

# Maximizing Saint Paul Employment Assets: Connecting the Workforce with Job-Rich Sectors



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## Prepared in Collaboration

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The project on which this presentation is based was completed in collaboration with the Metropolitan Council and City of Saint Paul as part of the 2020–2021 Resilient Communities Project (RCP) partnership. RCP is a program at the University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) that connects University faculty and students with Minnesota communities to address strategic projects that advance local resilience and sustainability.

The contents of this report represent the views of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of RCP, CURA, the Regents of the University of Minnesota, the Metropolitan Council, or City of Saint Paul.



**Resilient Communities Project**

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# Resilient Communities Project– Maximizing Saint Paul Employment Assets: Connecting the Workforce with Job-Rich Sectors

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Resilient Communities Project

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# Overview

- Introduction and Scope of Research
- Methodology
- Interviewing Reflection
- Limitations
- Descriptive Analysis
- Themes
- Recommendations

# Introduction and Scope of Research

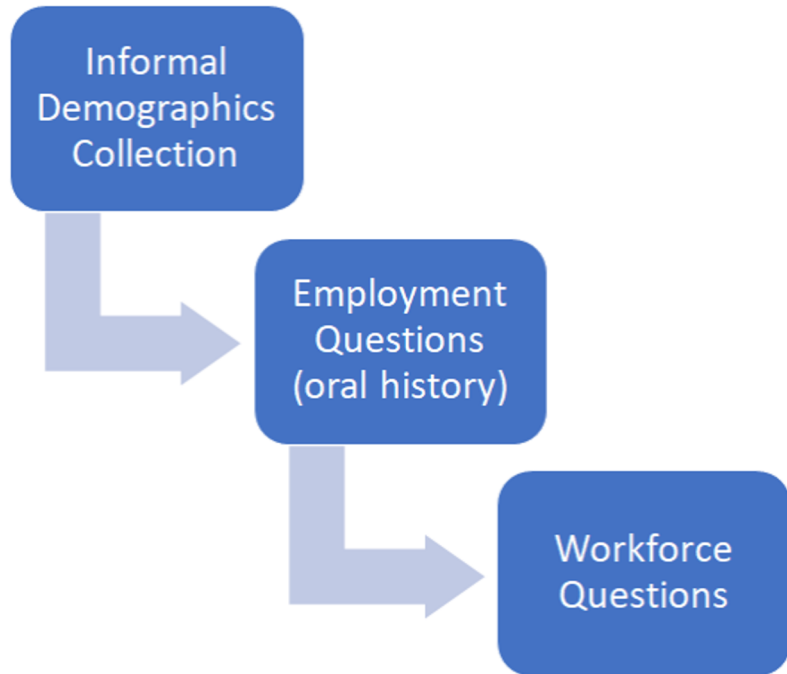
## About the Project

- City of St. Paul - Resilient Communities Project
- PA5041 Qualitative Methods
  - Understanding *concepts, opinions, and experiences*

## Research Topics

- User perception of workforce programs
  - Impact of identity and sectoral approaches
- Impact of COVID on workforce programs and job process
- Characterizing experiences, themes, and barriers to employment

# Methodology



Dayton's Bluff Library (Saint Paul)	Through Tech Pack Program 4 interviews, in-person
Professional Referrals	Through Professional Network 2 interviews, virtual
Personal Networks	Through Social Media 2 interviews, virtual

# Interviewing Reflection



- Vulnerable nature of study
  - Power dynamics
  - Emotional engagement
  - Mutual sharing
- Sensitivity of job history
- Wary of seeming condescending
- Cognizant of time burden

# Limitations

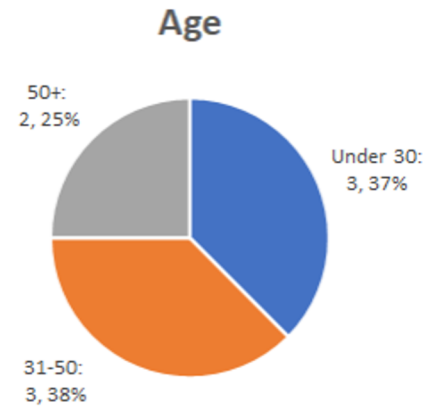
- COVID posed unprecedented barriers to recruitment
  - Safety concerns
    - Restricted outreach opportunities
    - Limited snowball recruiting
  - Library recruitment
- Difficulty identifying workforce programs
- Demographic information not formally collected



# Who did we talk to?

- **Eight total participants**
  - Seven jobseekers
  - Youth Vocational Program Director
- **East Metro residents**
  - Saint Paul: Mac Groveland, Highland, Merriam Park, Eastside
  - Little Canada
- **Minnesota transplants**
  - Four participants not originally from Minnesota

- **Occupations**
  - Arts and entertainment
  - Information technology
  - Oil and gas industry
  - Cosmetology
  - Education
  - Health care and social assistance
  - Food service
  - Construction



Educational Background	Total	Percent
Graduate	2	25%
Some graduate	1	13%
Bachelors	1	13%
Trade	2	25%
High School	1	13%
Unknown	1	13%

# Why were people job-seeking?



- COVID-related (3)
- Career transition (2)
- Competitive field (2)
- Gain experience (1)

**2 of 7 were currently unemployed.**

# Themes Overview

- How has COVID impacted the jobseeker experience?
- What resources are people turning to during the pandemic?
- What do people want from a workforce program?
- What did we hear about workforce counselors?
- Workforce programs were typically mentioned in a positive way, so why aren't people using them?
- How are people creating alternatives to formally established programs?
- How is not having an income/job impacting people?
- What role do people's families play?
- What is the nature of disconnection between employers and jobseekers?
- What are people looking for in a job other than income?

# How has COVID impacted the jobseeker experience?

*"When I thought I had COVID and took a test, they told me until I got a positive [COVID] result back, I'd be treated as negative and expected to come into work."*

## **COVID Impact on Job Process:**

- Limited hiring in certain industries
- Delays in hiring process
- Reduction in hours
- Job threatened by need to quarantine

## **Overall:**

- COVID has hindered the hiring process by limiting the number of positions and hours available to jobseekers.
- People are not feeling safe and supported in their jobs and are forced to make decisions based on safety.

# What resources are people turning to during the pandemic?

*"A lot of people in the workforce center are really, really good at their jobs and it's in their heart's calling to see people do well."*

**Four out of seven jobseekers reported using a public workforce program.**

- Ramsey County Workforce Solutions
- State of Minnesota
  - Dislocated Worker Program
  - Unemployment Office
  - CareerForce
- Vocational discovery programs
  - High School for Recording Arts
- Temp agencies
- Private or non-profit alternatives to workforce
  - Transcend IT
- Themselves
  - Social networks, social media, own "job boards"

# What do people want from a workforce program?

*"Being connected with potential employers, networking, learning about more skills through training."*

- Educational opportunities and skills development
- City- or field-specific resources
- City- or field-specific job opportunities and networks
- Accessibility
  - Participants were excited to learn about workforce
- To feel valued
  - Mentorships and relationships

# What did we hear about workforce counselors?

*"The biggest asset are the people when you walk in [workforce counselors]. They are so knowledgeable. They are so helpful. They really want like in their hearts to see you do good [...] they would know me by name."*

*"[The Workforce staff] are very responsive, compassionate, and creative with how they partner with us [youth workforce program] -- they've shown up before with \$100 gift cards for Christmas. They help young people get housed."*

*"It felt paternalistic, like 'oh poor thing', we need to fix you so that you can get a job."*

- Workforce counselors were central to participants' experience with the programs.
- Many participants emphasized the dedication and warmth of workforce counselors.
- Several mentioned ongoing, sustained relationships with their counselors.

Workforce  
programs were  
typically mentioned  
in a positive way, so  
why aren't people  
using them?

*"Public workforce programs do lead people in the right direction and they are wonderful."*

*"Workforce programs and tech programs, they really help and touch people's lives."*

- Alternative and private programs
- Temp agencies are filling the gap between unemployed and jobs quickly
- Misconceptions around what workforce offers
  - Who is workforce for?

*"I've been very much in taught how to...make a resume, how to write a cover letter. How to do an interview...So for me, personally, it's not really that applicable. But [workforce programs are useful] for a lot of people who don't have that experience or don't know how they're supposed to format a resume."*



# How are people creating alternatives to formally established programs?

*"In my industry, you don't need to do that because... we don't do like computer stuff, we don't need the skills that other people need for that stuff, so we just go on and apply and that's it."*

- Standard workforce resources are not tailored enough to jobs in all industries
- Some industries ask for proficiency in specific fields (museum instructors, hairdressers...)
- Many industries' employment process don't take place in standard ways, and personal connection and professional networks are what they need to get jobs

## Overall:

- People are creating their own systems and networks for job searching process in filling the void of the function of workforce programs in their specific industry.

# How is not having an income/job impacting people?

**Not having an income/job impacted different people in different ways.**

- People without employment rely on other resources.
- Some are able to support themselves, and some are struggling to make ends meet.
- Local connections become more important for economic/social support
- Length of living in Minnesota affect people's professional networks
- Family became an economic/emotional support system.

# What role do people's families play?

*"My brother was diagnosed with pretty severe cancer...I really wanted to make sure I could be able to visit him [in hospice]. And if I'm working in schools and exposing myself then I can't do that."*

## **Family Impact on Job Process:**

- Your family can be a good resource and advocate for you
- The job hunt or joblessness affects everyone in the family
- People were forced to make job decisions based on family obligations

## **Overall:**

- Family needs and structures impact individuals' reactions to losing a job, job selection, and behavior at work.

# What is the nature of disconnection between employers and jobseekers?

In general, we are not sensing an explicit disconnection between employers and jobseekers from the perspectives of jobseekers.

- Job seekers acknowledge the hardship in the labor market from external factors (risk of COVID, safety consideration, shrink in in-person positions...) and barely mention anything from the internal factors (employers)
- Job seekers put personal safety prior to career development, so there are jobs they can take but don't out of this consideration.
- People are finding it hard to look for jobs, but few in the study are completely out of jobs.

# What are people looking for in a job other than income?

“Well, I’m working in...[positions], doing some loading and unloading trucks for [company], my bachelor in science and electronic engineering, technology, so I’m looking for something more in my field.”

“The old [job] manager, she wouldn’t even talk to me when I send her the link about paid leave... she’s mad at me for taking two weeks for quarantine. The owner of the salon [job that’s about to start] reached out to me...he’s excited to help me to become the stylist that I want to be...”

- Job seekers are more willing to look for positions in their field of educational degree.
- Area of interests seem to be more important than simply making ends meet.
- The sense of community and human connection with employer highly affect career decisions.

# Recommendations

## Policy

- Expand partnership with temp agencies, non-profits, community partners to reduce overlap between services and reach more potential jobseekers
- Traditional workforce approach may not work for all industries - reconsider how workforce is publicized and work within industry groups (i.e., stylists)
- Ensure people know about workforce programs' existence and who can use them
- Workforce program evaluation surveys
- Public awareness "know your rights" campaign for business and employees

## Future Research

- Re-evaluate and be more intentional about BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) research.
- We ended up interviewing a lot of MN transplants. Is it a pattern for unemployment population? Are they using these resources more?
- Perceptions of government's role in workforce
- **Quantitative study (survey) looking at who the population of jobseekers is, why they are job seeking, what resources they are turning to.**

Thank you!